

SG1J

Managing the Psychic In Criminal Investigations

By
THOMAS J. GORDON...
JERRY J. TOBIAS

The term "extra sensory perception" possesses a certain fascination and magical charm. To many, it conjures up images of strange and mysterious events. The thought of an individual possessing the ability to read thoughts, predict the future, or reveal the past seems incredible. Yet, the media reports these occurrences with considerable regularity, and professionals are showing increasing interest in this phenomenon.

Historically, the term came into general use during the 1930s and suggests unusual human abilities which are scientifically unexplainable. These are often referred to as "psychic powers" and looked upon as supernormal or paranormal, as they do not adhere to the accepted principles of scientific knowledge or exploration.

Psychic and Police Work

Perhaps at this time you are wondering: "What does this have to do with police work?" The answer is quite simple. With increasing frequency, law enforcement officials involved in investigations are being approached by individuals who claim to possess powers of extrasensory perception and wish to offer their services.

However, to the average police officer, often skeptical by nature and suspicious by virtue of training, the psychic is placed in the same category as one who reads tea leaves or tarot cards and is viewed with little credibility.

The fact that police officers view the services of a psychic with less than enthusiasm should not be surprising since police organizations are typically among the most conservative of social institutions. Officers are trained to conduct investigations in an orderly fashion. They develop and organize leads, gather and maintain evidence, interview witnesses and/or suspects, and proceed in a methodical deductive manner. Consequently, the introduction of a paranormal investigative technique not only raises the specter of the occult, but is often perceived as damaging to the credibility, expertise, and professional prerogatives of the police. In a sense, it is an embarrassment.

While it is true psychic "investigators" have been consulted in a number of police investigations, they are typically brought in out of desperation on the part of the authorities, and then only when the inquiry appears stalled and intense pressure for

results is being exerted by the media or community.

Needless to say, the use of parapsychological investigative techniques by law enforcement officers remains a controversial issue. However, despite these concerns, individuals with bona fide psychic ability offer a unique and potentially valuable investigative skill. Thus, it is not the intent of this article to encourage or discourage the use of the psychic, but rather provide some general guidelines for the management of psychic investigations should a decision be made to proceed in that direction.

Guidelines

The first and perhaps most important step in managing psychic investigations is the selection of the psychic(s) to be involved in the case. This process can be facilitated by contacting reputable institutions or organizations involved in psychic research who may be able to provide a list of prospective or identify individuals who have demonstrated a "track record" in other investigations or within a laboratory research setting. Proceeding in this fashion accomplishes at least three objectives: (1) identification



THOMAS J. GORDON is currently employed in an administrative capacity with the Oakland County Office of Substance Abuse Services and has served on a part-time basis with the Hazel Park Police Department for over nine years. He holds the B.A. in psychology and M.A. in clinical psychology from Oakland University and is currently a doctoral candidate in educational/social psychology at the University of Michigan.

JERRY J. TOBIAS, Ed.D., P.O. Box 503, Bloomfield Hills, Michigan 48013, is a professor of education and human services at the University of Detroit, and a youth officer for the Southfield Township, Michigan, Police Department.



for whom there is some documented evidence of psychic ability, (2) increasing the chance of success in the investigation, and (3) providing further legitimation for the decision to explore parapsychological investigative techniques.

Next, a series of operational decisions must be made. Although situational circumstances may require some alteration in the following recommendations, each should be carefully considered:

1. *The decision to engage in psychic investigation should be kept confidential until after the psychic has completed the task.* It has been our experience that maintaining the confidentiality of the operation until its completion allows the psychic to work unfettered by pressures and expectations external to the investigation. It also maintains the propriety of the investigative effort and virtually eliminates the potential for a "circus" atmosphere.

2. *The selection of a team of officers to work with the psychic is of central importance.* The team should be composed of at least two or three officers who are fairly open-minded in regard to the existence of psychic ability. It must be remembered that while most psychics expect some skepticism concerning their abilities, hostile or overt skepticism may divert their attention and ultimately decrease their effectiveness. Consequently, the selection of members may be crucial to the success of the operation.

Likewise, the recommended use of more than one officer has practical implications since it will normally allow sufficient manpower for operational security and logistics (e.g., travel to the crime scene, securing and transporting evidence for the psychic to review, etc.), as well as provide additional opinions, observations, and/or corroboration during debriefings, reviews, or brainstorming sessions.

3. *Initially, officers assigned to work with the psychic should have only general familiarity with the facts of the crime.* Since many bona fide psychics appear to have telepathic ability, this recommendation is not really as unusual as it may first appear. This is particularly important if one is seriously interested in validating the legitimacy of the psychic's findings as opposed to finding out what is already known. For example, there have been several cases in the recent past where well-known psychics have either been called in or have volunteered to assist the police. Unfortunately, results of these consultations frequently had something like this, "While Mr. Psychic was unable to provide authorities

with any substantial new leads, officials were amazed that he confirmed information previously known only to the police." The point is this, while the confirmation may have been reached independently, it is likely the psychic unwittingly elicited the information telepathically from the officers around him.¹

4. *All working sessions and interviews with the psychic should be tape recorded.* These tapes should then be transcribed by a typist so that a written record of the psychic's impressions, statements, feelings, and concerns regarding the case can be maintained for later review and analysis.

Needless to say, the use of parapsychological investigative techniques by law enforcement officers remains a controversial issue

5. *Initially, provide the psychic with general but limited information on the case.* This will allow the psychic to develop impressions without being unduly influenced by more specific details. As progress is made, more information can be provided and verification of the psychic's impressions with existing knowledge about the case(s) can be given. However, an excessive amount of time should not be spent verifying existing knowledge since this may detract from the primary objective of eliciting new information. If the information the psychic "picks-up" appears relevant, provide supportive feedback and encouragement. This not only provides the individual some idea of how he/she is doing but may strengthen the psychic's resolve and help further focus his/her effort.

After the psychic has begun to provide impressions on the case, increased contact can be made with those officers most familiar with specific details of the case for purposes of verification of the psychic's impressions and exploration of potential

standardized set of questions that will provide uniformity to the investigation and will allow a comparison of data if more than one psychic is utilized. Questions (tasks) might include: (1) "Can you draw a composite of your impressions of the perpetrator?" (2) "Can you locate the residence of the subject?" and (3) "Would you prepare a profile of the subject which might include age, sex, physical description, occupation, academic background, etc."

7. *Consider the use of more than one psychic.* This will enable the investigation to proceed in a more scientific manner. Composites can be compared as can the responses to specific questions or tasks, thus allowing for a more controlled experiment.

8. *If the investigation involves more than one case, be aware of possible cross-contamination of psychic impressions from one case to another.* When this occurs, the psychic will have to be questioned in some detail to determine what elicited the impression and specifically to which case he or she believes the information relates.

Finally, two remaining caveats. First, while expectations can and should be placed on the psychic investigator, undue pressure to "perform" can have a negative effect on the overall results and, secondly, psychic accuracy may vary considerably and every impression may not be useful. Consequently, careful analysis of the psychic's impressions vis-à-vis supporting evidence and/or reasonable supposition must be made.

Conclusion

Experience suggests only a small percentage of professionals consider the existence of psychic ability an established fact. Conversely, few professionals rule it out as an impossibility, while many feel it is simply unproven at present. Police, meanwhile, remain uncertain as to its fact-finding potential.

Whether police agencies should explore the utility of extrasensory investigative techniques remains a moot point. Certainly there is controversy; but while fraud and deceit are not unknown qualities in the realm of psychic phenomena, many intriguing and scientifically unexplainable results have been achieved under controlled experimental conditions as well as spontaneous field situations.

As with any potential advance in technology or technique, ESP needs to be sufficiently field tested. Consequently, police executives are encouraged not to ignore this potential resource but rather place it among their arsenal of investigative tools for further experimentation and research. Perhaps in this way, the investigative role of the psychic will ultimately be more clearly defined. ★

6. *Be prepared to ask specific questions or request special tasks.* There should be a

¹ The literature suggests that telepathic communication is possible beyond the normal bounds of the space-time continuum. Consequently, there would appear to be no absolute way to assure the prevention of telepathic contamination.